



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

Coiste Polasaí Straitéiseach Gnóthaí Forbairt Eacnamaíochta & Fiontraíochta

Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) **Cruinniú/Meeting**

Tuesday 19th May, 2020

Council Office, Galway County Council, Galway

Members in attendance:

Cllr Karey McHugh (Chair)	Galway County Council
Cllr David Collins	Galway County Council
Cllr Declan Geraghty	Galway County Council
Cllr Thomas Welby	Galway County Council
Cllr Mary Hoade	Galway County Council
Dave Hickey	Business Representative
Dan Dowling	Community Representative
Marian Spellman	Trade Union Representative
Paul Carey	Business/Construction Sector Representative

Present:

Alan Farrell	Galway County Council
Kieran Coyne	Galway County Council
Diane Gallagher	Galway County Council

Apologies:

Breda Fox	Galway County Council
Cllr Gerry Finnerty	Galway County Council

Welcome

Cllr Karey McHugh welcomed everyone to the meeting. Cllr McHugh outlined that it had been over a year since the last SPC meeting was held and thanked the previous SPC committee for all their work and stated that as the SPC moves forward we will see the legacy of the outgoing SPC.

Cllr McHugh offered condolences to Cllr Declan Geraghty on the passing of his mother in the last week.

Cllr Karey McHugh invited each committee member to introduce themselves to the group.

- Mary Hoade – Elected representative for the Tuam Municipal District/Headford area since 1999.
- Karey McHugh – Elected representative for the Tuam Municipal District area and also comes from a family business background.
- Kieran Coyne – A/Senior Executive Officer Economic Rural & Community Development.
- Cllr Declan Geraghty – Elected representative Ballinasloe Municipal District and business owner.
- Dan Dowling – Galway PPN representative.
- Cllr David Collins – Elected representative Athenry/Oranmore Municipal District and small business owner.
- Paul Carey – Carey Building Contractors, Construction industry representative
- Cllr Thomas Welby – Elected representative Connemara Municipal District, previously small business owner.
- Dave Hickey - Business representative, President Galway Chamber of Commerce, currently working on business Continuity planning for the Local Enterprise Office.
- Marian Spellman – Union representative and nurse with Brothers of Charity Clarinbridge.
- Alan Farrell – A/Director of Service.

Overview of SPC – Purpose and Operation

Cllr Karey McHugh gave a brief overview of the SPC, she advised that a meeting had been due to take place back in March but due to Covid-19 and public health advice this could not go ahead, also due to new protocol the meeting it was necessary to implement a number of public health advices, including restricted the time to last 1 hour, ensuring social distancing and hand sanitizers were provided for use.

Cllr Karey McHugh stated that while this meeting was held in person as it was the first, that the committee can look at remote meetings going forward if necessary, as the use of technology and remote working was one of the positives from the crisis.

Alan Farrell then gave an overview of the SPC and how it operates:

- Each SPC will agree its annual programme, linked to the strategic policies in the Council's Corporate Plan.
- SPC chairs will report to the Council on the proceedings of the Committee.
- Each SPC's work will take account of the Council's overall corporate policy and objectives, comply with statutory provisions, integrate with statutory plans where relevant, and link realistically to financial resources.
- Each SPC may decide on appropriate consultative arrangements, having regard to statutory provision, the interests already represented on the SPC and any guidelines provided by the Council.

Role of the SPC's:

- The Corporate Policy Group (CPG) co-ordinate the work and monitor the work programmes of the SPCs. Council (governing body/Board of Directors) main decision-making body.
- SPCs advise and assist council in formulation and development of policy.
- Final policy adoption rests with the plenary Council.
- SPCs give Councillors and sectoral interest groups and involvement in policy making
- SPCs should adopt a multi-annual work programme linked to Corporate Plan.
- Corporate Policy Group should decide the work programmes of SPCs and recommend issues to be considered by SPCs.

Work Programmes:

Mr. Farrell gave an overview of items included in the work programme for Economic Development & Enterprise SPC as approved by the Corporate Policy Group and included in the SPC Scheme. The key headings included:

- Economic Development
- Enterprise Support
- Economic elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)
- Revitalisation of Towns
- Tourism Strategy

He advised that this SPC is an important part of the Council's economic planning for the County and that it would play a role in the development of the framework for many of the initiatives to be progressed over the lifetime of the Council.

Economic Development

Mr Farrell advised that the Council are required to complete a Local Economic Community Plan (LECP) every 6 years, the current one runs until 2022. The LCDC deal with the Community aspect of this plan and the Economic Development and Enterprise SPC deal with the Economic aspect. He said that the LECP is a statutory document and that the SPC have a key role to play in the formulation and review of the document. He said that in addition to the LECP, there would be other documents and actions contained in the LECP which the committee will contribute to.

Enterprise Support

Mr Farrell said that there are various enterprise supports provided at business and community level and that the Local Enterprise Office provides many direct supports, including tailored supports as a result of the crisis. He said that the committee will consider the various supports provided, including how the Council can assist enterprise both through national and local initiatives.

Regeneration and Revitalisation of Towns

Mr Farrell outlined the work of the regeneration team which has been put in place to focus on the revitalisation of our towns and to maximise the opportunity under the various funding schemes. He highlighted a number of projects that have already secured funding including the Bia Innovator Campus in Athenry and a number of other projects in Athenry Town centre, funding for the redevelopment of Loughrea Town Hall as an enterprise and cultural centre and funding for the development of the strategy and masterplan for Tuam. He advised that under the last call for proposal which had a closing date in February, applications for Clifden, Gort and Portumna were lodged.

Mr Kieran Coyne advised that there were also various community initiatives under the RRDF projects, citing examples in Athenry such as the Tidy Towns Committee, a local group looking at sustainable energy and heritage. Mr Coyne stated that projects need to take a planned approach, submitted for various schemes with a vision for the town.

Mr Farrell advised that a Rates Incentive Scheme has been piloted to help small businesses in town centres and that this and other supports would be considered further.

Atlantic Economic Corridor & Hubs

Mr Farrell advised that the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) Officer Brian Leonard would come before the SPC at a later meeting to outline how Hubs can be developed and the importance that these Hubs will now play with more people working from home. He stated that this is a strength the Council can play on. The concept behind the AEC is that it will provide a counterbalance to Dublin and the East, facilitating greater regional development. He advised that there are current plans for Hubs provided directly by the Council in Athenry (BIA Innovator) and Ballinasloe and that they are also looking at Tuam, Loughrea and Portumna as part of the RRDF process. The Council also supports a number of community hubs and it is anticipated that the AEC work will assist guide future plans.

Tourism

The committee were advised that the Tourism Officer had started with the Council at the end of last year and that she is currently working on the Tourism Strategy, as well as working with Hidden Heartlands and the Wild Atlantic Way teams within Failte Ireland. It was highlighted that Tourism is very significant for the economy in Galway and that the Council had a wide role to play in support its development.

Food

Mr Farrell advised that agriculture and food were also key sectors for the development in the County and that food was very much linked with Tourism and the experiences that tourists seek and that it was anticipated that the county would continue to build on successes from the European Region of Gastronomy designation. He advised that the Councils efforts in this area will be significantly through the operation of the BIA Innovator Campus in Athenry which is a transformational infrastructural enabler for food entrepreneurship in the West of Ireland.

Economic Development of key GCC assets

Mr. Farrell advised that Council continue to examine how it can maximise its assets under the various funding streams. He said that the Galway Airport site has significant potential for development going forward and that it is jointly owned by the County Council and the City Council. He said that it is anticipated that a framework document for the site would be brought through the Planning SPC.

Observations

Cllr McHugh invited the committee to give their observations on matters outlined above.

Dan Dowling:

Mr. Dowling stated that Tourism and the use of the airport will be important going forward. He stated that from a development point of view we are facing stormy weather and that after Covid we will be coming back to a different scenario where a lot of small businesses in particular in the tourism industry won't be viable and will struggle to reopen.

He stated that the world has changed completely in the last 3-4 months and stated that it will be hard to get back to business. He wanted to know what was going to be done to help small businesses at local and national level. Mr. Dowling stated that businesses in the tourism sector that employ a large amount of people in County Galway provide a huge service and are in need of help. Mr. Dowling stated that at both local and national level we need to focus on getting these businesses up and running.

Dave Hickey

Concurred with the previous speaker and noted that supports to small businesses will be essential going forward to allow them survive the current crisis. He suggested that the work programme will have to reflect a new reality and adjusted accordingly.

Cllr Karey McHugh

Cllr McHugh advised that this SPC meeting was mainly to highlight the work of the SPC and that the work programmes are ongoing and that the SPC will take in to account the current climate. There is a need to collaborate with the various agencies and the Local Enterprise Office. Cllr McHugh advised that current programmes are either in the middle of or are ongoing and that they may need to be restructured going forward.

Alan Farrell stated that everyone recognises that things have changed due to Covid but that the key elements of programmes from a strategic and sectoral level remain somewhat the same albeit that we will need to adjust to take cognisance of the current situation.

Marian Spellman

Marian asked if there was a timeline for the airport to be used in its current capacity as a Covid testing centre and was advised that the Council are not aware of an end date for the testing centre at this time.

Paul Carey

Mr Carey stated that he sees the Rates Incentive Scheme as one good way of helping businesses and also the shop front scheme was a good idea. Mr Carey advised that we should be mindful of how things have changed but that it was important to remember in 2-3 years some normality will resume. Mr Carey stated that the government are forthcoming with money/borrowings at present and that the Council need to take advantage of this and assess how this can be utilised. Mr Carey stated that the development of hubs throughout the County is important and that perhaps they could even be used as outpatient clinics.

Cllr Declan Geraghty

Cllr Geraghty stated that he agreed with a lot of what has been said, but he asked that the smaller towns and communities not be forgotten. Cllr Geraghty stated that these small communities have rallied together over the last few weeks and have been open to help members of their communities. Cllr Geraghty asked that there be a focus on helping small towns and communities as well as the larger towns.

Cllr Geraghty stated that he looks forward to working with the SPC committee and that there is a great opportunity for setting up hubs and allowing people to work from their local communities but that rural broadband is a huge factor in allowing this to happen.

Cllr Mary Hoade

Cllr Hoade stated that she is an outgoing member of the last SPC and that a lot of work was done over the 5 years. Cllr Hoade stated that the focus was different now and concurred with the points raised by previous speakers. Cllr Hoade stated that this is a rural Council and that there has been a demise of rural towns and villages. Cllr Hoade stated that there is a need to support these small towns and villages and that as schools may not even reopen in September that it is important to try and facilitate working from home for people. Rural broadband is an important factor in this. Cllr Hoade stated that current structure supporting businesses may need to be changed and that all plans to date may need to diversify. Cllr Hoade stated that life needs to continue in some way.

Cllr David Collins

Cllr Collins stated that revenue is down in small businesses due to social distancing and that investment is needed to make businesses safe to operate again. Cllr Collins stated that community groups now have a massive role to play in how people come together e.g childcare. Cllr Collins stated that the Economic Development and Enterprise SPC have a huge role in how we can invest in small businesses. Cllr Collins stated that the Local Enterprise Office are doing a great job but that there is a real fear that some businesses may not reopen due to the financial impact of the pandemic. Cllr Collins stated that he is looking forward to working with the committee and he said that is important that the various communities and businesses work together and that the Economic Enterprise and Development SPC has a role to play in terms of creating the environment for businesses and Economic Development to progress.

Cllr Thomas Welby

Cllr Welby stated that we are facing a bigger challenge than expected and that businesses cannot afford to pay rates, he stated that the formula of calculating rates also no longer exists. Cllr Welby stated that the good thriving businesses that once supported community groups are no longer able to do so. Cllr Welby stated that Galway County have an advantage due to our reputation and that the development of domestic tourism will be important going forward as foreign tourism is gone for the time being. Cllr Welby stated that the coordination of the Tourism Sector and the role of the Council and Tourism Officer will be important for the Economic Development of the County.

Cllr Karey McHugh

Cllr McHugh stated that she agreed with a lot of the comments made and that we are a very innovative Country. Cllr McHugh stated that we need to adapt and that there is a need for the opportunity of reskilling, education programmes need to be made available in communities. Cllr McHugh stated that we have highly skilled individuals throughout the County, and we need to figure out what we can do to get these people back working. Cllr McHugh stated that we need to think on our feet and learn how to adapt to the current situation.

Dan Dowling

Mr Dowling stated that the safety valve of emigration is no longer available and that we are an exporting country but that we are now in a totally different scenario. Mr Dowling stated that after this the country will be in a 20-30 million deficit and we need to figure out how we can lift the economy from that space.

Alan Farrell

Mr Farrell said that everyone recognises that we are now in a different space as a result of Covid 19 and that it would be some time before it is known how badly it will affect the economy locally, nationally and globally especially as Ireland is a small open economy. He stated that the role of the SPC is to guide, advise and assist the Council in terms of policy and strategy, and that while the Economic and Social circumstances have changed, the role of the Council and its key areas of support for Economic Development and Enterprise were significantly the same albeit that they needed to be adjusted to take account of the current circumstances.

Mr Farrell stated that he looked forward to working with the committee over the coming years and to address many of the key areas identified as part of the work programme with the valued input of the members. He said many challenges lie ahead and that while the Council are challenged from a resources perspective, he was confident that the work of the committee and the Council will continue to have a positive impact on the Economic Development of County Galway.

Schedule of Meetings

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on the 30th June.

Cllr Karey McHugh confirmed that the remaining meetings will take place on the following dates:

Tuesday 30th June at 14:30

Tuesday 8th September at 14:30

Tuesday 1st December at 14:30

Cllr Declan Geraghty queried if there was a Sports Officer in the Council and whether or not there could be some link between the Tourism Officer and the Sports Department to help our communities become social again. Mr Kieran Coyne stated that there is a Sports Partnership Section that are part of the Community Call, a Community Wellbeing Initiative is currently being implemented.

AOB

Cllr Karey McHugh asked if there was any other business.

As there was no other business to be discussed Cllr Karey thanked all for attending and stated that the committee has a good platform going forward.

The meeting then concluded.